10: d'Orleans--348-351 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 171, 527, 535, 796

[LSS: During the New Year celebration in Luang Prabang.]

"Whatever be the origin of these two 'monsters,' [LSS: dancers in masks] they seem to amuse the crowd very much, and when after having knelt in front of the pagoda and wished the spectators a happy new year, they begin to dance, I am surprised beyond measure to find that it is the [pages 349 and 350 contain illustration] [351] self-same dance which I saw when travelling through Thibet with M. Bonvalot two years before. The steps and the attitudes are exactly the same, and it would be interesting to know whether this is a mere chance or due to the existence of the same traditions between peoples living so far apart. The tam-tam, which is beaten by hand, without any rhythm, is the music used as an accompaniment, and from time to time the monsters make a charge and send the crowd flying, one of them chasing a young girl round a tree. I can see only Laotians among the spectators, the Kas holding aloof. When the dances are over, the procession starts on its way back, the priests being escorted back to their several pagodas."

15: Benedict--388-389 L-5 (no date) 1947 Laotians
116, 171, 212, 538

"The Lao script was derived from Khmer writing, probably in the thirteenth century. It is a simpler archaic version of Siamese writing, which is also of Khmer (and ultimately Indian) origin. The White Tai and Black Tai of Tonkin employ similar alphabets, possibly later derivatives of the Lao alphabet. Remarkably enough, the White Tai of Nghê-an, under Annamese influence, write this script in vertical lines, from right to left, as in Chinese! Lao literature naturally has much in common with Khmer literature, as described above, and bears the same deep imprint of Buddhist India. Native Lao (Thai) features are apparent in the more folkloristic aspects of the literature, however, and the poetic forms are [389] much freer than those of Khmer."

15: Benedict--389 L-5 (no date) 1947 Laotians
116, 171, 178

"The present-day position of Lao, is to be contrasted with that of Khmer. The Lao of French Indochina are simply an eastern extension of the much larger Lao group within Siam itself, the Mekong river being a political rather than ethnic or cultural boundary. Siamese, although spoken only in central and southern Siam, has a dominant cultural position and is gradually encroaching on the Lao-speaking areas of northern and eastern Siam. With further political growth in Siam, coupled perhaps with a Pan-Thai movement, we may look forward to further extension of Siamese at the expense of Lao, Shan, and lesser Thai speeches. If the Mekong river boundary is maintained, however, the Lao of French Indochina (Laos) may be sufficiently buffered to stand up under these linguistic influences. In any event it is apparent that Thai speech, whether Lao, Siamese or some newly evolved dialectical variant, will long continue to play a leading role in this part of Indochina."

26: Brodrick--60 [2] S-3 (1939) 1944 Laotians
116, 144, 171

"The inhabitants--or rather the civilized inhabitants--of the Laos country are of the same stock as the Siamese--at least they speak an allied language and they appear to be the same people as the Laos in northern and eastern Siam."

66: Dobby--299 [3] N-5 (no date) 1950 Laotians
116, 105, 161, 171

"Laos, the state of the Middle Mekong, is peopled by Laotians who are ethnically related to Tais. They live in small agricultural hamlets and have strong Buddhist associations and semi-feudal customs, with a disinterest in mime and dancing, therein differing from Cambodians farther south."

satisfaction and finds a pleasant test of his abilities in setting words to refrains whose meaning is unknown and in stimulating laughter or pleasant and amusing ideas in his audience, either by vaunting the joys of love and the plastic perfections of the human body, or by recalling [217] useful or pleasant memories, or by honoring justice and goodness. The morals of these folk, who are indolent because they are content with very little and are happy and healthy, and to whom all our subtleties are unknown, permit the greatest license in songs and improvisations and the greatest realism and crudity in the expression of thoughts.

In spite of this, there is not the least unhealthy intention in either the poet or his audience. As we have seen above in connection with burials, children of both sexes attend all these festivities accompanied by their parents. They all take pleasure in the same refrains and laugh at the same funny sayings, not because they are vicious but because they are pure pagans for whom enjoyment and pleasure are like gods. The songs are animated by graceful gestures, and together with the music form a whole which is poetic according to their particular esthetic canons and which is simply a manifestation of art and not an indication of loose morals.

Theater. The Laotians also have a dramatic repertory consisting of longwinded plays, epics, religious and warlike stories, romantic tales, ancient legends, etc. These poems are played by several actors, with an orchestra and supernumeraries, and require many very ornate costumes which have not varied in form since the earliest times. Usually, however, the costumes are mere tinsel.

Like the Cambodian and Siamese theater from which it comes, the Laotian theater interprets age-old works taken from the Védas, the Ramayana or the Mahabharata. To this repertory are added purely Kmer plays and various adaptations of Burmese origin which are performed in the classical costumes and in which a strong tinge of comedy and modernism and a bit of satire are mingled with the ancient traditions.

Women are excluded from the theater, and the female roles are played by young men. As in the case of songs and improvisations, dramatic knowledge, the repertory of plays and the art of acting are handed down from father to son. The actors are called Lakhone and plays are called Kam-Kong-Lakhone or Kam-Kong [218] Fone-Lakhone if they include dances or ballets. Finally, one last dramatic genre

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Sports and games. These are widespread in Laos.

"Boxing has fervent disciples there, as does flat-handed wrestling. Some of the champions have remarkable professional skill, agility and cleverness which never lose their elegance.

"The Laotians play with balls and shuttlecocks, but without using either their hands or rackets. Any other part of the body, for example, from the foot to the head, may be used to return a ball or shuttlecock. Nearly all young people play this extremely graceful game, which requires great suppleness, a quick eye and perfect ease of movement, which in this game should be neither jerky nor violent (1).

[171]

(1) This game is also played in Burma, whence it was doubtless imported into Laos. The ball is made of large-mesh rattan latticework and is spherical in form with a diameter of ten to twelve centimeters. The shuttlecock is half-spherical. It is of similar construction, covered with cloth and provided with feathers along the edge. (Author's note.)

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"Like all Orientals, Laotians have a passion for games of chance in any form. This is the race's only real vice, and the French administration is obliged to maintain active surveillance over it.

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"A form of chess, more complicated than the game played in Europe, is widely played, and a few players are highly reputed for their perfect grasp of the game." (Le Laos français.)

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Celebrations and festivals. In addition to the legal public holidays, the temperament of the Laotians leads them to celebrate a great many others, for the most diverse and the most futile reasons. In principle, the Laotian makes no expenditures to ameliorate his daily fare and the pleasures of the table, as far as choice foods go, are indifferent to him. This does not prevent him, however, from organizing celebrations among relatives, friends and neighbors which anyone can attend without being specially invited. This custom of giving public festivities, or "Ngans" to use the native term, where everyone eats and drinks, has a good time, jokes and makes love, shows the friendly side of the Laotian character and the extreme sociability of the people. Those whose personal resources are too limited to cover the expenses of a "Ngan" either join with others in similar straits or go skirmishing through the city or village in search of the money, food, brandy and wax needed to accomplish their plan.

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527 182 Those desirous of obtaining special graces give similar celebrations which last several days and several nights, and the offerings are more beautiful and more varied. It is generally on occasions of this sort that assumptions of the habit by bonzes and their pupils are particularly likely to occur.

Being present at these ceremonies confers certain indulgences, and that is why they are so punctually followed and why all those who take part try [224] to help in celebrating them by offerings of all sorts.

[196] On the spot where the celebration is to be held, a sort of pulpit is constructed beforehand where the bonzes stand as they come up by turns to read passages chosen for the occasion from the sacred books. They never allow themselves to be disturbed by the surrounding noise, but stand as if transfixed in the middle of the songs and shouts.

It is readily understandable that this should be an agreeable way to procure one's salvation, but since it is very costly it is not within everyone's means. Fortunately, there are ways of compromising with [565] heaven which enable even the poorest to associate themselves in these great celebrations, in accordance with their resources, by means of even very modest offerings and to benefit therefrom both spiritually and materially.

There is no doubt but that a belief in the efficacy of plenary and partial indulgences enters into their consideration, but it is equally reasonable to suppose that the attraction of the profane pleasures which one enjoys in the course of these gatherings is not the least of the motivating causes which lead the Laotian people to frequent them so zealously.

[171] Pirogue races. We have seen that pirogue races and regattas took place during some of the legal holidays, and a few words of explanation on this matter are given below.

526 501 This custom must have been introduced by the Malays and then handed down from the Kmers to the Laotians, following an ascending direction from south to north.

The pirogues used in the "Souang-Hua" (1) regattas are specially

(1) Literally, pirogues which run.

built and exclusively reserved for this use. Sometimes as much as twenty-five meters in length, they are hewn out of specially chosen wood and have most elegant delicate and elongated lines. Their extremities are armed with what appear to be slender gilded horns. The exterior is lacquered black with gold ornamentation and the

149: Reinach--400 G-3 (no date) 1931 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

[102]

APPENDIX XVII
ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PEOPLES OF LAOS
I

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Which was the truly autochthonous race, whence did it come, and what were its mores and customs? No one can answer this question, and the only statement which can be advanced is that the savage peoples must have settled in the Indo-Chinese peninsula at a time when present-day Indo-China did not yet exist, geologically speaking, and when a greater or lesser part of the Asiatic continent was covered by water.

Coming from the Malay Archipelago, the Khas occupied the south of the peninsula at first and immediately entered into a struggle with the aborigines. Stronger and more intelligent, they drove the aborigines back into the forests and mountains and founded groups and colonies in their midst which gradually absorbed the first occupants, until that day when the victorious Khas came up against men of the yellow race who drove them back into the mountains in their turn, and into the poorest and most remote parts of the land.

Coming down from the high plateaus of central Asia, probably from Tibet, the men of yellow race came in through the northwest and at first occupied the northern provinces of the immense territory which was later to make up the Chinese empire. These natives, whom the Chinese chroniclers designate by the name of Y, that is to say "Bearers of large bows," and by the name of "Miao-Tse," or "Sons of the uncultivated fields," were driven back in their turn by new invaders. They then fell back into the southern provinces and sought refuge on little-accessible peaks where more or less pure types of their ancient race may still be found today, and from there they spread into the valleys of the Mekong, the Menam, the Salouen and the Irrawaddy. Isolated from one another as a consequence of their expansion, these individuals of primitive race became mixed with one another and with the first inhabitants of the conquered regions, and gave birth to intermediary sub-races and to distinct groups whose character and even number is very difficult to determine. Language became [103] differentiated, the kind of handwriting used was influenced by the proximity of more powerful peoples, dress changed, and yet all of them preserved analogous usages and beliefs which militate in favor of a common origin. Thence arises the necessity of seeking the origin of these peoples in the diversity of families, tribes, sub-races and races which sucessively shared the extreme provinces of present-day

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China and Indo-China(1)

(1) E. PIANON. LE LAOS français. 1701 CHALLAMEL. [PARI

from the linguistic point of view to the Mon-Khmer group, possessing a two-class social system (Lévy). But one must reach the seventh century of the Christian era to arrive at the solid ground of historic realities.

HISTORIC PERIOD. THE KHMER INFLUENCE

Just as the countries of the Far East received in their early stages of development the imprint of foreign civilizations--all are aware of their debt to the Graeco-Roman civilization which each one has known how to adapt to its particular genius--so in the same manner Laos has benefited in the beginning from the neighboring civilizations.

In the present state of our knowledge (this phrase will recur frequently in our writings, but it is necessary to put "not initiated" in face of the difficulties encountered by the researcher), the traces of this Khmer influence appear only at very different epochs according to the regions studied. Thus, we find them as early as the sixth to eighth centuries up until the thirteenth century of our era in the province of Champassak--moreover there was in this region a large kingdom known as Wen-Tan in the Chinese annals--then from the tenth to the thirteenth century in the neighborhood of Vientiane, and finally from the twelfth to the fourteenth century at Luang Prabang.

[13] The most important monument of Champassak is the Vat-Phou (See appendix).

In the province of Savannakhet future explorations in the region of Keng-Kok will probably furnish valuable information. A rapid trip we made through this area revealed sites which had never been mentioned before. Apparently a strong Cham influence occurred in this province, but the question is still too new for one now to reach any conclusions.

At Vientiane, the most ancient Khmer vestiges are most probably found in the neighborhood of the pagoda called Vat Si Muong. A magnificent Khmer bust of the thirteenth century, recently discovered a few hundred meters from this pagoda, seems to confirm this hypothesis. But there again the novelty of the problem forbids any hasty conclusion.

The Khmer influences in That Luang, which had been anticipated at the time of the restoration of this monument by the French School of the Far East in 1931, begin to be revealed. The Buddha said to be that of Fertility, which is in the cloister, is no more than the

172 transformation of a Khmer dvarapala (guardian of the gate) into a
171 Buddha of Laos. The pious hands of the faithful have restored this sculpture according to the rules of the artistic canon of Laos by means of limestone mortar. Finally, the discovery at the beginning of the year 1951 of a magnificent Khmer Jaya Buddha of the thirteenth century opens up new horizons on the influence of King Jayavarman VII in this southern part of his empire, although his role in this country was already known to us by the discovery in 1903 at Say Fong of the inscription named "stele of the hospitals" (see appendix: Vientiane).

At Luang Prabang the stele of the 900 Vishnu discovered in 1917 had already shown that Brahmanism [14] had apparently been in vogue here for a short while. When a certain number of Buddhist sculptures of the twelfth to thirteenth centuries were brought to light during the war, the theory had to be revised according to which Buddhism was not introduced into the kingdom of Luang Prabang before the fourteenth century of our era.

175 Thus, it is principally in the thirteenth century that the Khmer empire exerted its maximum influence on the provinces of northern Laos. But, as Mr. Coedès very correctly observes, the thirteenth century found the whole of Eurasia under the hands of the Mongols. Ever since his accession as grand Khan, Kubla Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan and conqueror of China, sought to obtain the oath of vassalage from the foreign sovereigns who were in the habit of giving it to the Chinese T'ang dynasty. Although these same Sino-Mongolian armies were always defeated or only temporarily successful, their attack produced deep repercussions. The most important of these was the advent of the power of the Thais in the basin of the Menam and in Burma with all its results for Cambodia, the principalities of the Mekong and those of the Malay Peninsula.

HISTORICAL LAOS OF THE XIVth CENTURY TO THE PRESENT DAY

The end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries saw the establishment of principalities in the valley of the Menam and their internal struggles. The weakening of the principality of Soukhotai favored the formation of the state of Laos.

Fa Ngoum (1316-1374) reigned from 1353 to 1374. This king was the true founder of the kingdom of Laos. He spent part of his childhood as an exile in Cambodia where he was brought up by a religious scholar of the capital. When he was sixteen years old, King Jayavarmanparamecvara [15] gave him in marriage to his